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MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS AND PHILOSOPHY
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

April 17, 1979

Dear Friends,

Since taking power in 1965, the military dictatorship in Indonesia has conducted a barbaric campaign of violence and oppression against its own people and those of neighboring regions. Hundreds of thousands were massacred within Indonesia, much of the population has suffered increasing misery and starvation in the midst of massive corruption and opulence, and tens of thousands of political prisoners have suffered torment and savage treatment -- and still do. Since 1975, the Indonesian army has engaged in a near-genocidal campaign of aggression in East Timor. Courageous dissidents who have attempted to expose some of these horrors, in particular the participants in the student movement, have been subjected in their turn to the terrorism of the regime.

Throughout this entire period, the military dictatorship has received full support from the United States, including the crucial military aid which enables it to maintain domestic power and to carry out its massacres in East Timor and elsewhere. Nothing in recent history demonstrates more clearly that "the Soul of our foreign policy" is not "human rights," as President Carter has proclaimed, nor any concern for democracy and freedom, apart from the freedom for foreign investors who are indeed free to exploit the rich resources of Indonesia with the willing cooperation of the military regime, as long as they too can enrich themselves in the process.

One essential aspect of the support of the US government for the Indonesian reign of terror is a massive cover-up. The State Department Human Rights Reports have been a contemptible example. As in the past, the mass media remain quite generally within the framework of the state propaganda system. Only an energetic popular campaign can bring about a change in the support of the US government for the continuing brutality of the military dictatorship. I urge you to lend your support to this campaign in the manner suggested in the accompanying materials and to give the widest possible publicity to the information they contain. There is no more urgent task for people who are seriously concerned with freedom and human rights.

Sincerely yours,

Noam Chomsky

WRITE TO: Patricia M. Derian, Assistant Secretary for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, U.S. Dept. of State, 2201 C St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20520

SEND COPIES TO: Honorable Don Bonker, House Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20515

His Excellency D. Ashari, Ambassador of Indonesia, Office of the Embassy of Indonesia, 2020 Massachusetts Ave., Washington, D.C. 20036

RETURN TO: Emergency Committee for Human Rights in Indonesia and Self-Determination in East Timor, Box 27, Thurston Court Apts., Ithaca, N.Y. 14850

Name _____

Address _____

_____

_____

Enclosed is a contribution of $ _____

Please make checks payable to "Emergency Committee."

A note to friends and supporters of:

• TAPOL (U.S. Campaign for the Release of Indonesian Political Prisoners) • Clergy and Laity Concerned • American Friends Service Committee • Friends of East Timor • Other concerned organizations and individuals

FREE THE INDONESIAN STUDENT LEADERS!

Thirty-one student leaders are now being held in six Indonesian cities for involvement in the widespread, *peaceful* student protests of late 1977 and early 1978. The students are being tried under laws originated by the Dutch colonial regime to repress the Indonesian independence movement. The laws forbid such vaguely defined actions as "spreading hatred," "insulting the head of state," and "disseminating offensive writings." If convicted, the students face up to seven years imprisonment.

BACKGROUND

In January 1978 the Indonesian military regime arrested hundreds of student leaders and "froze" all elected student councils throughout the country. In February and March of the same year, several leading universities were put under military occupation. On some campuses, students were attacked with bayonets; on others, the army attacked university buildings with tanks. The brutal military crackdown on unarmed students resulted in several deaths and hundreds wounded.

The students had been protesting General Suharto's blatantly rigged, unopposed "election" to a third term as President of Indonesia. Their protests included criticisms of conditions that have become pervasive under the Suharto regime: poverty, corruption, repression, and the increasing gap between rich and poor.

The protests began in August 1977, when President Suharto sent a delegation of key generals and cabinet ministers to several campuses for a dialogue with the students. To the surprise of the delegation, students in Surabaya and Jogjakarta were scathingly critical. When the students in Bandung demanded action on critical problems facing the nation, the delegation broke off the dialogue. The students published their criticisms in a White Book and began a widening series of peaceful civil protests.

The protests intensified in late October with the revelation that famine had struck many regions, including Karawang, once the rice bowl of Java. Worse, the government, concerned about its image, had concealed the famine and failed to obtain relief aid for its victims. (Under normal conditions 60 percent of Indonesia's 140 million people suffer from malnutrition, in a country that 20 years ago was self-sufficient in basic foodstuffs.)

CONDITIONS OF DETENTION

Suharto—his shaky military coalition threatened by the protests—responded by arresting at least 600 student leaders in January and February of 1978. The student prisoners were held in detention centers in several areas of the country. Their families had no knowledge of their whereabouts. Most of the students were gradually released, but those singled out for trial—and many of the others—were subjected to various means of torture. A statement made by Lukman Hakim, former Chairman of the University of Indonesia's Student Council, revealed that he and his fellow-student leaders were "brutally interrogated, almost all the students detained with us experienced beatings, electrical torture and isolation cells. For months we were confined along with criminals, whose cultural traditions—beatings and other violence—we did not fail to undergo."

GOVERNMENT MANIPULATION OF CHARGES

Cornell University Prof. Benedict Anderson, a specialist in modern Indonesian politics, notes that the students "were initially detained under charges of subversion, were steadily interrogated on these grounds from February to late October 1978, at which point the investigation was dropped and release papers signed. But at that time, suddenly new criminal charges of 'insulting the Head of State' were brought up to justify further detention though no further interrogations were ever held. The abrupt change from 'subversion' to 'insults' shows only that the Indonesian government's charges are adapted to circumstances ('subversion' in February to justify mass arrests and ensure Suharto's re-election as President; 'insult' in November out of fear of international opinion). It should be noted further that *exactly* the same thing happened to 30 other youth leaders, who are now going on trial in six *different* cities. In *every case*, they were originally arrested as subversives, and are now being identically charged with 'insults'. This also shows that manipulation of trials is coordinated at the national level."

THE STUDENT LEADERS' "CRIMES"

The "insults," "hatred," and "offensive writings" that the student leaders spread are really nothing more than an American political party platform. According to the students' White Book:

> Since the whole [political and economic] situation must be drastically changed, we have set two goals for our struggle, namely, *to replace Suharto via the general session of the MPR* [Indonesian parliment, empowered to choose the president] *in March 1978* and *to change the national development strategy.*
>
> After the General Session of the MPR in March we must have *a new President* and *a new government*, capable of eradicating the present shortcomings. May we remind you that the students are fighting for the establishment of a clean government that is based on the 1945 Constitution and the true Panca Sila [Basic priniples of the Indonesian state] !

PRESS BLACKOUT ON TRIALS

Since the trials began in February 1979 the Indonesian military government prohibited press coverage of the proceedings. A new government Code of Ethics puts the journalists in breach of the law ("spreading hatred," "disseminating offensive writings") if they report the contents of the trials. The Suharto regime clearly hopes to limit international awareness of the situation by banning media coverage and restricting access to the courtrooms. The Indonesian authorities know that the trials cannot reflect positively on the regime's international image; thus, the less said about the trials, the better.

THE ROLE AMERICANS CAN PLAY

The secrecy of the trials underscores the Indonesian government's sensitivity to reactions from abroad. In particular, the authorities are sensitive to American opinion; the United States has been Indonesia's main source of international military and economic aid since 1965. Protests from Americans can help win the freedom of the 31 student leaders.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

*Write to the U.S. State Department Office of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs. Stress that the State Department must inquire into the violation of the human rights of the student leaders. Make clear that you think the Indonesian government should drop all charges and release them unconditionally. Send copies of your letter to the officials listed below.

*Send copies to your Senators and Congresspeople, with a note asking them to inquire with the State Department about the case of the Indonesian student leaders.

*Alert friends and any organizations you may know of. Send them copies of this notice. Encourage them to write too.

*Have all or part of this notice reprinted in any newsletter or newspapers you may have access to.

*Send us copies of your letter. Let us know of your interest by returning the form below.

*Send a contribution if you can. Contributions are urgently needed.

ACT QUICKLY

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